

Week Ending Friday, November 21, 1997

**Remarks to the Women's Leadership Forum in Las Vegas, Nevada**

*November 14, 1997*

Thank you very much. Thank you all for being here, for being in such a good humor. [Laughter] You know why they're sitting down now? Because they think I'm going to talk a lot longer than previous speakers. [Laughter]

I want to thank Senator Reid and Senator Bryan and Governor Miller, for being here, for their service, and for their remarkable friendship to me. I'd like to thank the national chair of the Women's Leadership Forum, Cynthia Friedman, who is also up here on the stage with us. And we have other people here from the National Democratic Party—I see Carol Pinsky out there—I thank all of them. But I want to say a special word of thanks to Shelly Berkeley and to Cassandra Williams, and to you, Mayor Jones, all of you who made this night possible.

This is an event sponsored by the Women's Leadership Forum, but I see there are a few lucky men out here in the audience—[laughter]—and I thank you for showing up, too. I'd be lonely if you weren't here.

I got tickled when the mayor was telling that story about my mother, which is a true story. That's not one of those things you make up because it sounds good on the podium. My mother spent the last weekend of her life in Las Vegas. [Laughter] And she had been quite ill for a long time. And the night she passed away she called me, and we had a long and perfectly normal conversation. And I thought to myself that in her own mind she got to go to heaven 4 days early. She looked at it that way. [Laughter] So whenever I land at the airport here, I always imagine that my mother is landing with me because she loved to come here so much and had so many friends here.

Let me say very briefly to all of you, this is a very exciting, interesting, and good time

for America. Congress just went home. We had a very good year. We passed an historic balanced budget agreement. It had the largest investment for children's health that your National Government has made since 1965. It has a huge effort to improve research and care in the area of diabetes, an illness that affects 16 million Americans. The diabetes foundation said it's the most important thing done in diabetes since the discovery of insulin 70 years ago.

It has a major, major investment, the largest investment in education since 1965, everything from more Pell grants to more work-study positions to more funds to put computers in every classroom in this country by the year 2000. It, for the first time, puts us on record as favoring national academic standards and a voluntary testing system to see how all our children are doing. This was a great budget, and it is going to make a huge difference in America. Yesterday I signed the last big piece of it, dealing with the health care and the education initiatives.

The Senate ratified the Chemical Weapons Convention that will make all of you young people here and your children less likely to be exposed to deadly chemicals from terrorists and organized criminals, a terribly important thing.

The Congress passed landmark reform of the Food and Drug Administration which will enable us to continue to test medicines to make sure they're safe for the American people but will move them to the market a lot quicker, so that people who have serious illnesses in America and want to know they're going to get access to the medicine that's the best in the world as quickly as possible will know that we're doing the best job in the world of both protecting their safety and getting them medicines that can save their lives. This is a huge issue.

The Senate and the House passed a landmark reform of our adoption system in America to give massive new incentives and speed

up the system by which families can adopt children, which is a terribly important issue. Just last year we passed a \$5,000 adoption tax credit, and in a few days, when Hillary comes home from her trip—she worked hard on this—we're going to have a nice little signing ceremony and describe to the world what this adoption initiative does. But it is very important, and I'm proud of it, and every woman in America should be proud of it.

So this was a good year, a historic year. And it was another step along the way in trying to implement the vision that I ran for President 6 years ago to try to implement. One that, thank goodness, has received the support of a substantial majority of America's women and has helped us to build a party for the future.

But it's pretty simple. I know that we are moving into a very different time. We are dramatically changing the basis of economic activity. We are seeing dramatic changes in the way people live as well as the way they work and the way we relate to each other. Our own country is changing dramatically; we're getting more and more diverse in every conceivable way but especially in racial and ethnic and religious terms. The way we relate to the world is different. We are the world's strongest military power and have the world's strongest economy, but we are still only 4 percent of the world's population, with about 20 percent of its income, so that, increasingly, our ability to succeed in ensuring our own future depends on our willingness to get involved in issues beyond our border and our willingness to recognize that we are interdependent with others and that we have to work in partnership with others.

What are the big security problems of the future? Terrorism, weapons of mass destruction proliferation, organized crime, international drug dealing, international environmental crisis, the spread of new diseases across national borders—none of these can be dealt with unless we're willing to work as partners. We can lead, but we have to lead in a world increasingly interdependent.

In Bosnia, we are there with soldiers from more than two dozen other countries, including Russian soldiers working side by side. That is a metaphor for what we'll have to do in the future.

And what I want to do is to have an America in which every person, without regard to his or her circumstances in life, has a chance to live out his or her dreams if they're responsible enough to work for it and to be a good citizen; a country in which we're coming together instead of being driven apart, as so many other societies are; and a nation still strong enough to lead the world for peace and freedom and prosperity. We've been working at it for 6 years now.

The economy is stronger; we have the lowest unemployment rate in 24 years; we have the lowest inflation rate in 30 years. We had another big drop in the crime rate last year. The murder rate in America has dropped 22 percent in just 3 years, 10 percent last year alone. We've had the biggest drop in welfare rolls in the country's history. And even though we've had two decades of immigration, lots and lots of poor people coming to our shores to work and find their way, we have the smallest percentage of our population on welfare in almost 30 years. This country is working again. We're coming together; we're moving into the future again.

And I guess what I want to say to all of you, since you invested in this to come here, is you've got to do a better job of telling people that this did not happen by accident. When I started running for President with my rather earthy friend, James Carville, from Louisiana helping me—[laughter]—a brilliant young man by the name of—James is from Louisiana; Paul Begala, his partner was from Texas, and I was from Arkansas—and a brilliant young man by the name of Gene Sperling, who is now my national economic counselor from Michigan, came to work for us. And he called his mother after working for us for about a week, and he said, "Mom, if I'm going to survive down here with all these guys from the South, I'm going to have to learn a lot more animal stories"—[laughter]—because we would all say things like our opponents were squealing like a pig under a gate—[laughter]—or you never know how far a frog will jump till you punch it. [Laughter]

But one of the things I was taught as a child is that if you see a turtle on a fencepost, the chances are it didn't get there by accident. [Laughter] And so, all these things that

are going on in America didn't just happen. We had a different political philosophy—not different values for the Democratic Party, the same values—but we believe we needed a new politics for a new era.

And I must say, I've been deeply grateful for the support of both your Senators and your Governor in every critical step along the way, because it was basically what people were doing as mayors and Governors and State legislators throughout America anyway.

But I thought, on the economy, we had to bring down the deficit and invest more in education and our future. I thought we had to trade more around the world. I don't believe it's right to say we can walk away from the obligation to sell more American products around the world. This is not rocket science: If you're 4 percent of the world's population and you have 20 percent of the income and you'd like to keep it, you've got to sell something to the other 96 percent. If your markets are open and other people's markets are closed, in order to make a trade agreement with them, you have to lower your trade barriers a little bit so they'll lower theirs a lot. That's probably a pretty good deal.

On the other hand, we can't afford to say that's all we're interested in because the economy is churning so much today, most people who are dislocated from work lose their jobs because of technological changes that will occur in every country whether there's more trade or not. But because we're Democrats, we have an obligation to worry about those people, to give people a better, quicker, more comprehensive system if they are dislocated from their jobs for whatever reason to move back into the work force more quickly, and to contribute with us to our future.

I believe on welfare we should require people to go to work, but we ought to recognize that their most important work, like everybody else's, is raising their children. So when they said in the other party, "Oh, by the way, we want to require people to go to work and take away from the children the fundamental right of nutrition and the fundamental right of health care," and "by the way, we don't want to come up with any more money for child care," I vetoed the bill twice, because I thought it was wrong. Now, but

once we got it right, I changed. I signed the bill because it was consistent with what we've been working on for 3 years. But a lot of people don't get it. I still read in the paper, some journalist will say, "The President signed the Republicans' welfare bill." Bull! [Laughter] What planet were they—it's like in Washington. It's amazing. If an issue has a certain label on it, a lot of people in old-think say, "Well, that label belongs to one party." The Democrats weren't supposed to be interested in crime and welfare and growing the economy. Don't be involved in people's lives. How many elections will you win?

In crime, I read the other day that someone said, "Well, some people in the House of Representatives were mad at the President for adopting a Republican position on crime." I said, hello—[laughter]—what planet was this person on?

In 1994, the Democrats, over the bitterest, fiercest opposition of the Republican leaders and a bitter attempt in a last-ditch filibuster in the United States Senate by my distinguished opponent in the last election passed a crime bill that they were against and we were for. It put 100,000 police on the street and took assault weapons off the street. And I think it was right.

We were for the Brady bill; their leadership was against it. And it played a role—65,000 police officers in 3 years have been approved under the crime bill to be put out on the streets. And if you go to any community in the country where the crime rate is coming down, they'll tell you the central reason is there has been a change in the philosophy of policing in this country, to get kids and keep them out of trouble in the first place, to walk the blocks and to build ties to neighbors, and to catch people when they do commit crimes more quickly. And that, plus the generally improving circumstances in America, is plummeting the crime rate in this country. And that is a good thing. But it did not happen by accident.

I say that because we need people to understand that we still have big challenges out there. And we need the support, and we need to build an infrastructure of Americans who understand that the politics of this country have changed.

In the environment, 1995, one of the most troubling things about the new Republican majority in Congress was their contract on America said the only way we could have a good America is to grow the economy and forget about the environment. We're going to break down all these terrible regulations for clean air and clean water and it's just choking business. And I said, "Well, if we Democrats were trying to choke business by cleaning the air, cleaning the water, and cleaning up the toxic waste, we've done a sorry job because we've had more new businesses start in every year since I've been President than in any year in American history." So we're not very good at killing business with environmental regulation. We're not very good at that.

We believe you have to protect the environment and grow the economy. Shelly had that little passing line about the nuclear waste disposal—I thought you'd never mention it. *[Laughter]* I hope that everyone in Nevada remembers that there's been pretty much of a partisan divide on that, too, although some of our Democrats have strayed over to the other side. But that's just because it's a big problem in their States, and they want to dump it somewhere, and they've never been here. *[Laughter]*

My position has never been to come here and pander to you; it's just to tell the truth. This is a serious issue, and we should not make a decision to do this anywhere until we're sure that it is safe and we're absolutely certain that our predecessors didn't pick a site for political reasons, because you don't have many electoral votes. That's all I've ever said.

And I can honestly say that neither of your Senators, nor your Governor, ever asked me to promise that under no circumstances ever would I say that I didn't care what the evidence was, I would never think about this. All they said was, "Make sure that we're doing the right thing by our children and make sure that we haven't been singled out because we're a big State with still a fairly small population and not many electoral votes." That's all they asked. And that was the right thing to do. I thought it was right then; I think it's right now. And I appreciated it.

Again, let me say the reason this is important is not so Shelly can win an election—I'm not running anymore, so I can say all this—*[laughter]*—this is not just about an election for Congress; it's about how you're going to live.

We still have a lot of other issues. Let me just give you some issues that I think would be quite important to you. We still have to pass through Congress legislation which implements our initiative to reduce teenage smoking in America and saves lives. It's going to be a huge thing, and we have to do it in a way that improves the public health and protects our children. That's a big issue for next year.

Next year—a couple years ago we passed a bill that stopped insurance companies from kicking women out of the hospital in 48 hours after they had had a baby, whether they were ready to leave or not. And we now find that a lot of the same things are happening with mastectomies, when the women are leaving, and I think we ought to have the same standard for that. I think that's an important thing.

But in a larger sense, we believe strongly that there ought to be a patient's bill of rights for quality health care that doctors and patients have worked on. And if we're going to have more managed care and we're going to have more HMO's, people have the right to know that—that's a good thing if somebody is taking your health care money and making it go as far as possible so we don't have inflation, as long as you're not giving up quality.

Now, right before this Congress broke up, there was huge news back East about how the leaders of the other party had called the health insurance companies and others and told them to get up off their backsides and go to work to kill our attempts to protect the quality of health care for patients in this country. That's a big issue. That is a choice.

I believe we can moderate health care costs and guarantee quality. I believe it is part of the Nation's responsibility to do that. If you believe that in 1997 terms, that makes you a Democrat, because that's our party's position. And that is not their position.

You have got to help us go out and clarify these choices for people. We passed that economic program in 1993. They told me, the

people in the other party said I was going to bankrupt the country; we'd increase the deficit; and the economy would go into the tank. Well, that's what they said. They actually won a congressional race partly on that—that and telling everybody we were going to take their guns away and all the stuff they said in '94.

Well, sooner or later, people should be held accountable. Are our ideas right? Were they implemented? Have they made a difference? Were their ideas right? Were they implemented? Have they made a difference? I've done everything I could to work in a responsible, bipartisan way, but where there are still clear differences, I think the evidence is, we were right.

Today I took action again to try to deal with this assault weapons problem because, now that we've banned them in America, you've got all these foreign gun manufacturers who are trying to modify their assault weapons to get them in under the sport weapon definition. So I said, for 120 days we're not going to take any more of these weapons until we study it. I am not going to let people overseas turn our streets into battle zones where gangs are armed like they were guerrilla warriors halfway around the world if I can stop it. But you've got to decide.

So I thank you for being here. I thank you for your contributions. But let's go out and have a little debate here—1998 is an election year—and ask people to think about whether they really believe what has happened in America has happened by accident. Ask them to think about what they believe the Nation should do.

The Democrats of 1997 are not out there defending big Government and big regulations and all this. We've reduced the size of Government by 300,000—more than any previous Republican administration in modern times. We have reduced more Government regulations. We have given more authority to State and local government. We have privatized more operations than previous Republican administrations.

But we have not given up the fundamental responsibility to define the national interest when it comes to protecting families and children and communities and futures. That's

what we haven't done, and that's why this country is moving forward and moving forward together.

I want you to be a part of it. I thank you for being here tonight. I hope you'll help us in all these elections. But talk to people about what is going to affect our children's lives. We're making a difference, and you can make a bigger one.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:50 p.m. in the New Country Club Building at the Sheraton Desert Inn. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Bob Miller of Nevada; Carol Pensky, treasurer, Democratic National Committee; Shelly Berkeley, candidate for Nevada's First Congressional District, who introduced the President; Cassandra Williams, reception chair, Women's Leadership Forum; and Mayor Jan Laverty Jones of Las Vegas. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

### **Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Dinner in Las Vegas** *November 14, 1997*

Thank you. Thank you very much. We've had such a nice evening, it seems a shame to spoil it with a speech—[laughter]—but I'd like to say a few words. First of all, I want to thank Brian and Myra for once again welcoming me into their homes and for being my friends, and for being my friends when I was the fifth-best known candidate for President in the New Hampshire primary. When the only person in America who thought I could be elected was my mother—[laughter]—they were my friends.

I also want to thank them because we share something else in common. In addition to the fact that Brian and I went to college together, our family and theirs, we're both parents of only daughters who are reasonably important to us. And I had Amy with me for a long time, and I miss her terribly, so I'm glad to see her here tonight. It was wonderful having her in the White House for the years that we had her.

I'd like to thank Governor and Mrs. Miller and Senator and Mrs. Bryan and Senator and Mrs. Reid for being here tonight. And I'd like to thank the people of Nevada for voting for Bill Clinton and Al Gore twice.